

Compost that Crawls – Indoors!

Vermicomposting, or using worms to compost your food scraps, is a simple and inexpensive way to reduce your waste! The worms digest your scraps to produce “castings” that make excellent plant food. All you need is one (maybe 2) large, opaque plastic utility storage bins.



Step 1: Prepare the bin.

- Drill several rows of 1/8” ventilation holes under the top rim of the bin. These holes should be about 1½ inches apart. Then drill several dozen ¼” holes in the bottom of the bin for drainage purposes.
- Place the bin on a flat, solid surface; like cement blocks. This elevates it to a convenient height and ensures good drainage while limiting the passage of worms and other organisms both in and outside of the bin.
- If your operation is indoors, place bricks inside of a bin without holes and nest the prepared bin inside. This will catch all of draining liquid and prevent it from leaching on your floors.

Step 2: Get your worms on.

- You may either get your worms from a local store, such as Native Nurseries, or you can mail order them. The recommended species is *Eisenia foetida* (red worms). About a half pound to a pound is a good starting point. *Note – ordinary earthworms from your garden are not suitable for vermicomposting.

Step 3: Make your worms at home.

- Start your bin by lining one end of the bottom with damp shredded newspaper. Add the worms and a small amount of food scraps, and then cover the entire bin with another layer of damp shredded newspaper.

Feeding your worms

Keep a covered pail near your garbage or kitchen sink to collect food for your worms. They especially like bread, melon rinds, banana peels, paper napkins and towels, coffee grounds, and coffee filters. Food items to keep away from the worms include bones, meat, tomatoes, citrus, and onions. Bury your worm food with damp shredded newspaper to discourage fruit flies. If your compost seems wet, use dry paper.

Don't overfeed your worms. Too much food will cause odors and become toxic for the worms. Add food only as the previous batch is nearly all consumed.

Extracting the Compost

After the worms consume your food scraps, which may take a month or two, it's time to extract the castings. An easy way to harvest the castings is to let the worms separate themselves in the bins. You can do this by only burying food at one end of the bin, gradually rotating the position where you feed the worms. Worms will migrate to the fresh supply of food. The area left behind consists of dark, crumbly castings that you can take out to use, and will have very few worms left in it.

Alternatively, you can dump out the contents of the bin outside in the shade. The worms will move to the center of the pile, and you can scrape or “tickle” the worm-free compost off the top and sides until there is nothing left but worms.

Tips for keeping your worm bin indoors

- You may dilute the drainage that has collected in the bottom of your nested bins with five parts water and water your plants with it. They will love it!
- Overfeeding your worms will create an odor. Feed them only as needed!

Tips for keeping your worm bin outdoors

- When drilling holes into the bin, locate and angle them in ways that will prevent rain from getting inside. Putting holes under the overhang of the lid helps.
- When frost is forecast, cover the bins with tarps so that they do not freeze.
- In the heat of summer, make sure the bins are in deep shade throughout the day.

One pound of worms consumes about four pounds of garbage a week, and four people generate about one and a half pounds of garbage per day. So, the average family should be feeding their worms about 3 times a week.

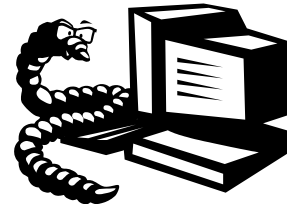
Worm-casting magic

When added to soil, or sprayed on foliage, worm-castings and worm-casting tea provides the following benefits:

- Increases the nutritional quality and the flavor of vegetables
- Adds to the quantity and quality of plant-available nutrients,
- Increases plant growth
- Makes the benefits of vermicompost go farther
- Helps to suppress diseases
- When sprayed on the leaves, aerated compost tea (ACT) helps suppress some foliar diseases
- Controls the proliferation of harmful organisms
- Replaces the use of toxic chemicals"
- Speeds the breakdown of toxins in the soil
- Provides beneficial microorganisms to the soil
- Improves soil structure

“All your plants will benefit from the worm castings. In the ground or in pots, doesn't matter... Worm castings bring beneficial microbes to the root zone and the microbes cycle nutrients for the plant. It is a beautiful symbiosis. So liven up your soil. Add Worm Compost.”

*Louise Devine Turkey Hill Farm
4/20/2010*



Additional information can be found at the following:

Vermicomposting:

http://solutionsforyourlife.ufl.edu/hot_topics/lawn_and_garden/vermicomposting.html

“Worms Eat My Garbage” by Mary Applehof.
Ordered it at your local book store or on the web:

http://www.wormwoman.com/acatalog/Wormwoman_catalog_Worms_Eat_My_Garbage_3.html

The following eBook is available on the internet:
“Make Your Own Brewer and Brew Compost Tea at Home!” Second Edition Copyright © 2006 by Mary J. Tynes

<http://www.booklocker.com/books/1812.html>

“Cheap and Easy Worm Bin:”

<http://whatcom.wsu.edu/ag/compost/Easywormbin.htm>

Other models you can build yourself or purchase:

<http://www.vermiculturenorthwest.com/wormbins.htm>

More in depth reading and viewing:

<http://www.worndigest.org/>

<http://www.cityfarmer.org/wormcomp61.html>

*Ed Schroeder and Janis Piotrowski
Master Gardener volunteers with the
Leon County Extension Service
Gardener.Ed@gmail.com
janpio@comcast.net*